



DAYS OF DIALOGUE
The First Step...

NO EXCUSES: A DAY OF DIALOGUE ON CREATING A BETTER FUTURE

Days of Dialogue works with medium to large groups of individuals and organizations and engages them in facilitated dialogues on an array of topics. Trained volunteer facilitators are recruited by the Los Angeles City Attorney's Dispute Resolution Program and other local facilitation and mediation organizations.

Days of Dialogue was founded in 1995 and is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization.

From June 12, 2012 – June 15, 2012 Days of Dialogue, in partnership with the Chaka Khan Foundation, conducted the program “No Excuses: A Day of Dialogue on Creating a Better Future” at four juvenile halls and camps in the Los Angeles area. The dialogue sessions created an opportunity for incarcerated juveniles to discuss their life experiences in a safe and neutral environment, and provided them with the means to deliver direct feedback regarding how they might create a better future for themselves.

578 juveniles participated over the course of the four days. Each session began with a brief statement by Chaka Khan; Veronica Everett-Boyce, President of the Chaka Khan Foundation; and Avis Ridley-Thomas, Director of Days of Dialogue. A video that had been produced specifically for this program was shown to the entire assembled audience in order to establish a common experience, and to help kick start the dialogue. At each location, the video was followed by at least three guest speakers: an entrepreneur, an ex-gang member, and a rap artist.¹ Next, Dr. David Campt further prepared the youth for their discussion sessions by introducing the use of audience polling technology. Utilizing clickers to enable the audience response, polling technology helped to:

1. provide an interactive opportunity for the youth to engage the day's program
2. demonstrate to the youth that their comments and input were being listened to
3. potentially generate data that would have value for staff, administrators, and policy makers with regard to their delivery of services to the incarcerated youth
4. begin to develop the framework for a full research study about incarcerated youth

After initial polling, the juveniles were divided into small groups, no larger than 10. The youth convened to classrooms along with the volunteer facilitators. 62 total volunteer facilitators participated, the majority of whom were trained and recruited by the Los Angeles City Attorney's office, with additional outreach and participation on the part of Robert Sowell of the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission, several facilitators from the Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution, and the LACBA Center for Civic Mediation.

¹ Speakers included: Troy Campbell, Nipsey Hussle, Omar Cruz, Bill Thomas, Janice Bryant Howroyd, Yolando Yo Yo Whittaker, Henry Vega

The small group dialogues were divided into three phases in order to focus on the core themes:

1. Who are we?
2. What do we think of our current situation?
3. What needs to happen so that we can move forward to a better situation?

During the three phases the facilitators were required to take notes on four questions (see page 6). At timed intervals throughout the approximately 1 hour 20 minutes of dialogue, members of the Themes and Ideas team (a cadre of undergraduate and graduate student volunteers) gathered these notes from the classroom groups, categorized the responses, and input the information into the polling software.

At each of the four locations, after the small group dialogue sessions, the youth re-convened in the gym, where they were presented with the information that had been gathered in real time during their discussions. The audience response clickers were re-distributed, and the youth were polled with the same questions and were able to choose 1 or 2 out of 10 of the most popular answers from each question. The last three polling questions allowed the youth to express their opinion of the entire day.

The following report is a summary of the data collected during all four days of dialogue at all of the locations. 77% of total participants responded to the questions with the polling technology (clickers). The top three to four answers from all respondents are graphed below. Please note that this was not a scientific survey, in that participants were selected by site probation officers, rather than randomly selected. The responses reflect the first person statements and opinions of the incarcerated juveniles who participated.

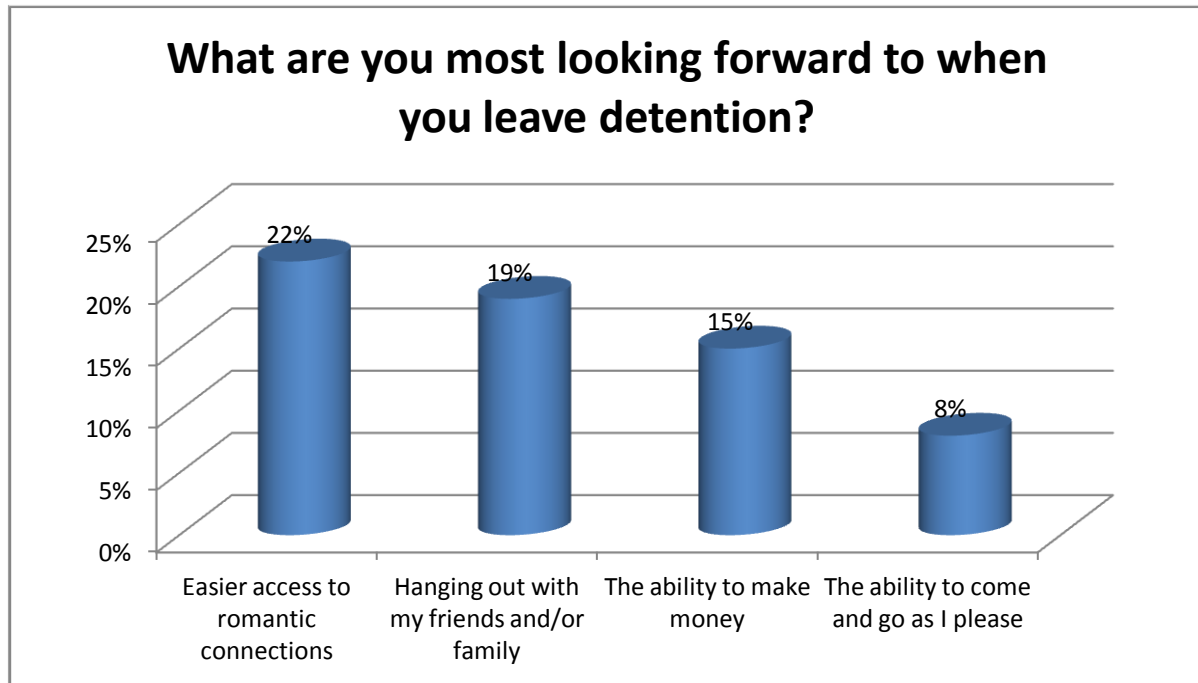
Chart 1 lists the dialogue sites, dates, and the number of juveniles participating in dialogue at each site. 578 juveniles were present as participants in the dialogues.

LOCATION	DATE	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Central Juvenile Hall Los Angeles, 90033	June 12, 2012	200
Los Padrinios Juvenile Hall Downey, 90242	June 13, 2012	208
Camp David Gonzales Calabasas, 91302	June 14, 2012	100
Camps Scudder and Scott Santa Clarita, 91390	June 15, 2012	70
TOTAL:		578

Chart 1 – Dialogues were held at four Los Angeles County Juvenile Detention Centers

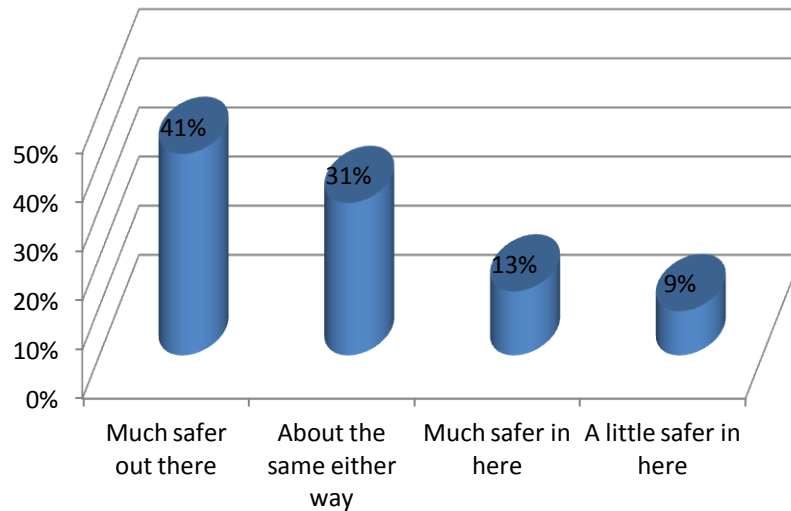
- What are you most looking forward to when you leave detention?
- How safe do you feel in here compared to your life out there?
- What is your best explanation of why you are here?
- Does the detention system help or hurt more kids?
- What are you most looking forward to in life 5 years from now? (Camp facilities only)

The top three to four responses are shown in graphs 1 through 5.



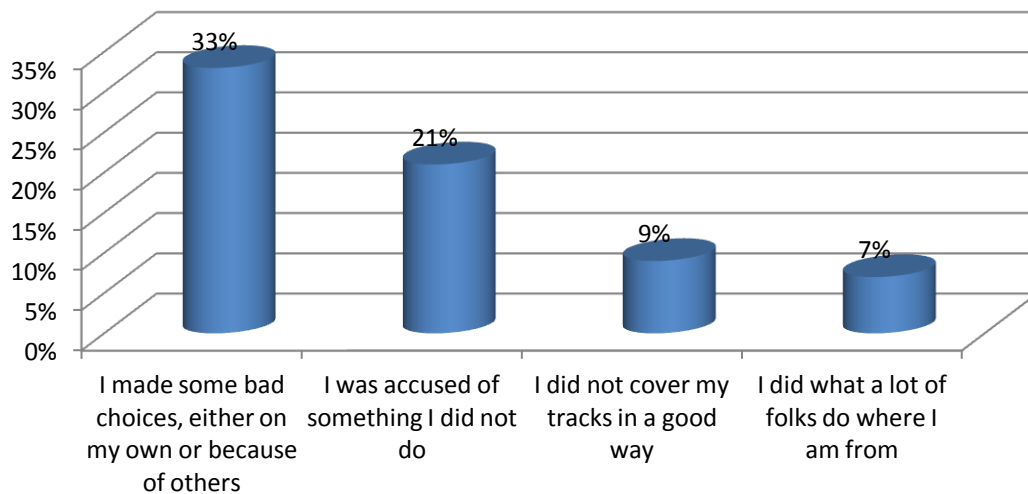
Graph 1

How safe do you feel in here compared to your life out there?



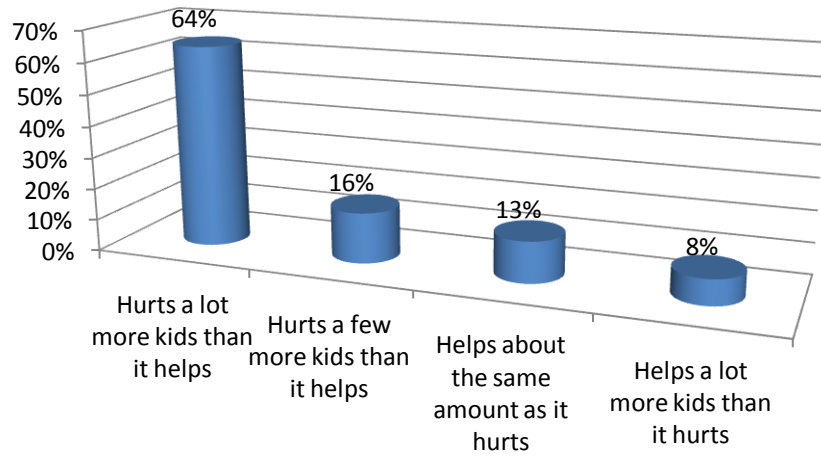
Graph 2

What is your best explanation for why you are here?



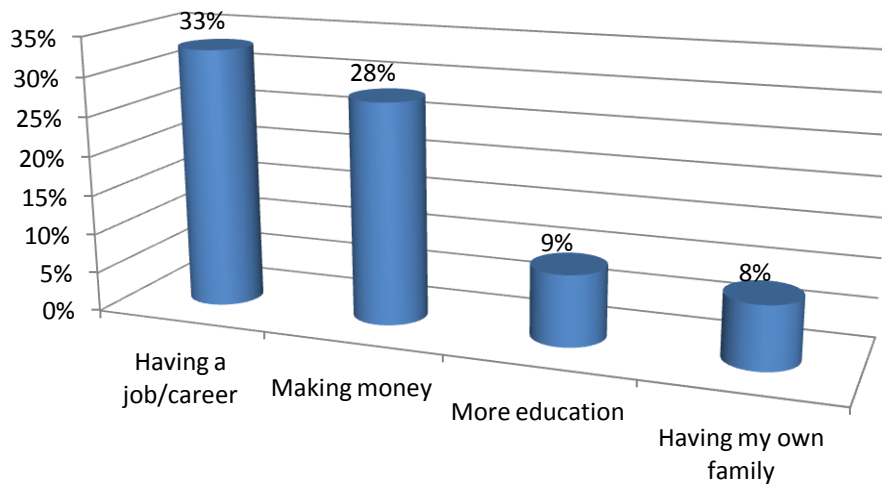
Graph 3

Does the detention system help or hurt more kids?



Graph 4

What are you most looking forward to in life 5 years from now?

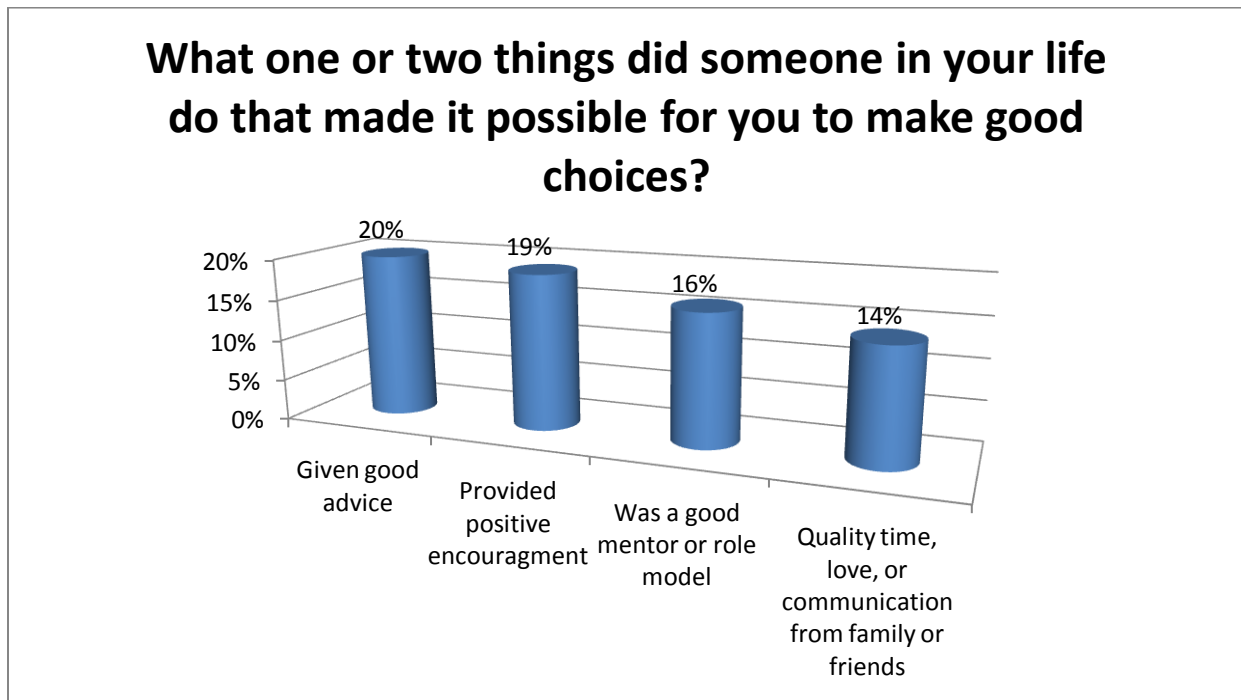


Graph 5 – Asked of the two camp facilities only, percentages are based on 170 juveniles

During the small group dialogues the facilitators asked and took notes on 4 required questions:

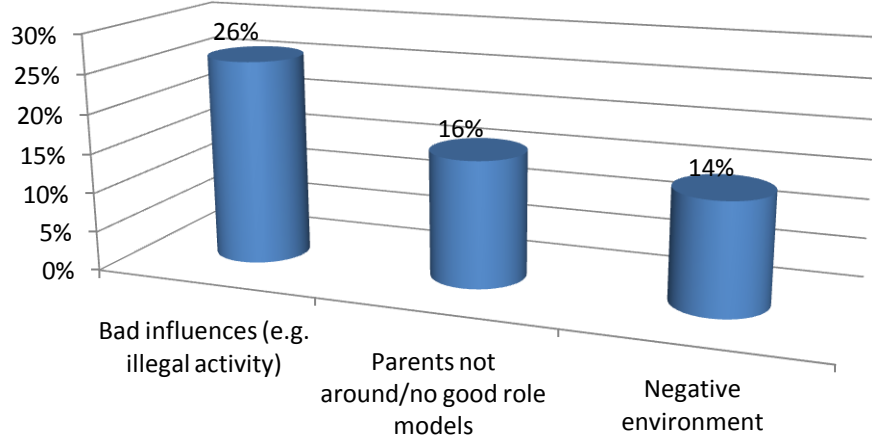
- What one or two things did someone in your life do that made it possible for you to make good choices?
- What one or two things did people in your life do that made it difficult for you to make good choices consistently?
- What do you think that youth like you need to focus on most to create a better future for themselves?
- If adults who ran places like this truly wanted to help you make better choices, what would they do?

These notes were then gathered, sorted, and categorized. The top 8-10 answers for each question from all the groups were then used in the audience polling. The top three to four responses are shown in graphs 6 through 9.



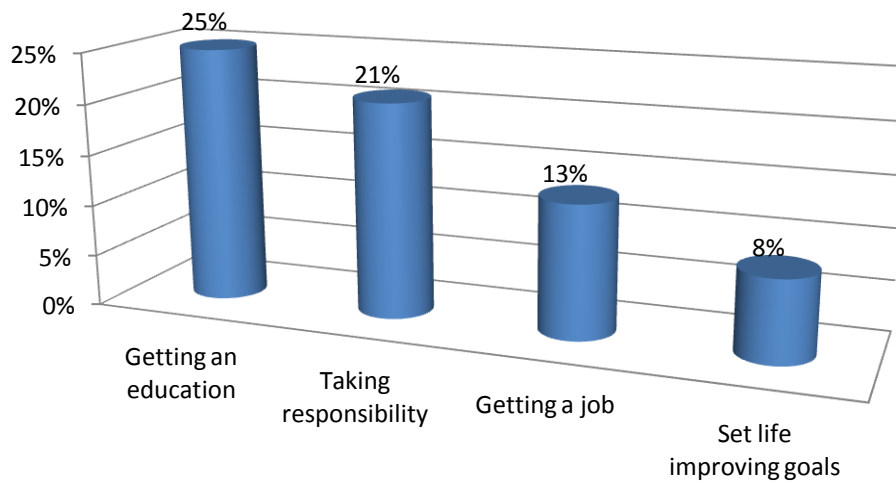
Graph 6

What one or two things did people in your life do that made it difficult for you to make good choices consistently?



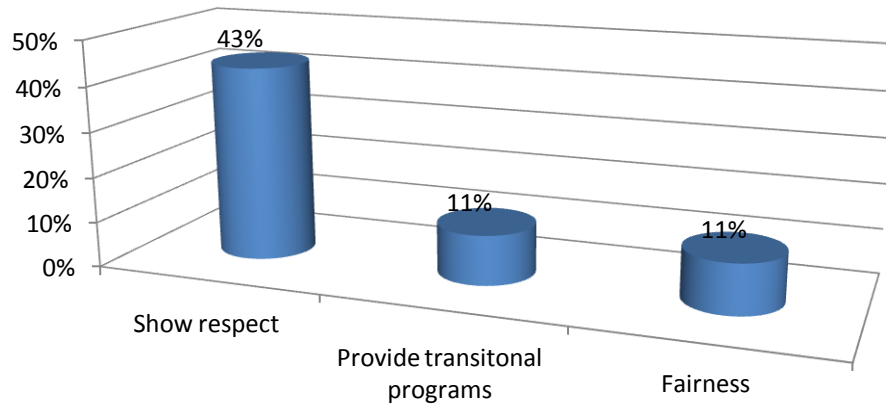
Graph 7

What do you think that youth like you need to focus on most to create a better future for themselves?



Graph 8

If adults who ran places like this truly wanted to help you make better choices, what would they do?

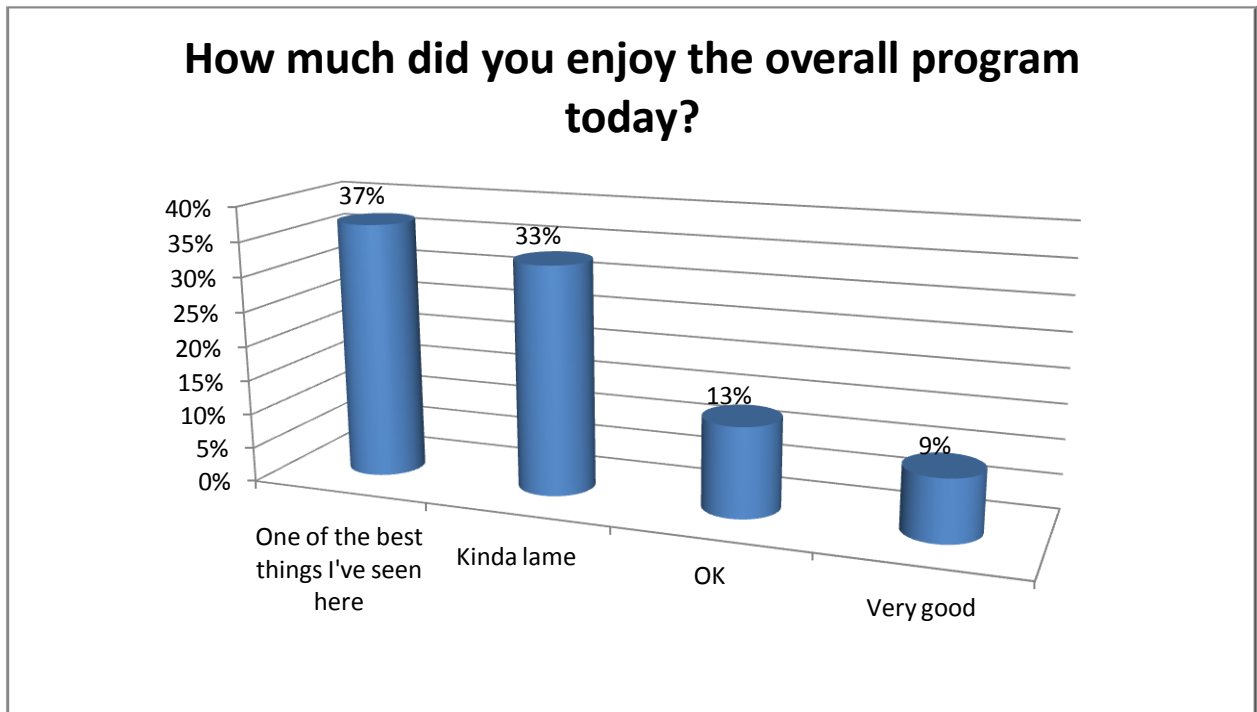


Graph 9

The last 3 questions allowed the juveniles to provide feedback to Days of Dialogue and The Chaka Khan Foundation about the program as a whole:

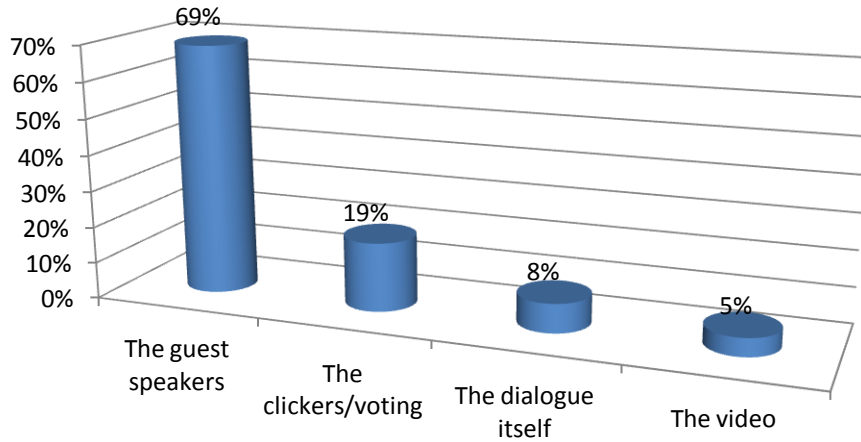
- How much did you enjoy the overall program today?
- Whether you liked the program a lot or a little, what was your favorite part of the program today?
- Compared to yesterday, how motivated are you to make new choices for a better future?

These responses are shown in graphs 10 through 12.



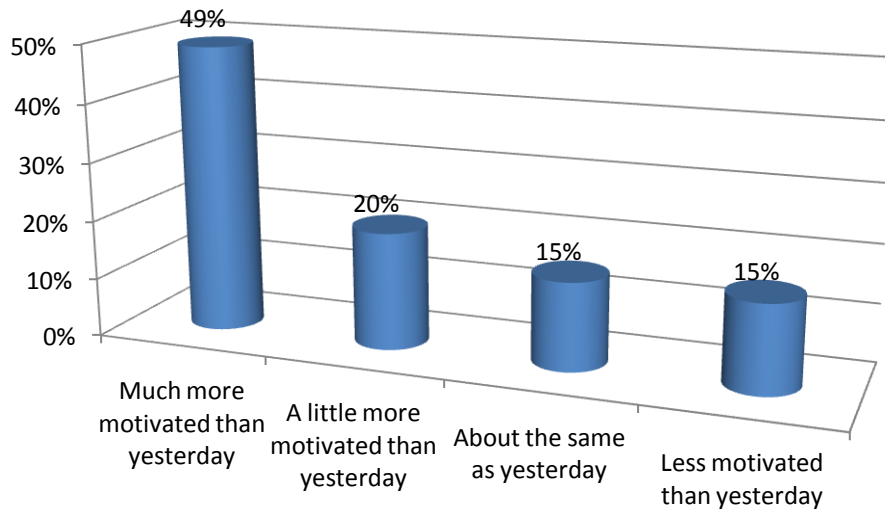
Graph 10

**Whether you liked the program a lot or a little,
what was your favorite part of the program
today?**



Graph 11

**Compared to yesterday, how motivated are
you to make new choices for a better future?**



Graph 12

In Conclusion

"No Excuses: A Day of Dialogue on Creating a Better Future" was developed specifically for incarcerated youth. The goal was to create an integrative array of activities that would encourage the youth to speak their minds, and to provide a credible delivery system (i.e., the data set) so that the opinions expressed could be communicated to probation officers, family members, researchers, funders, and policy makers. Most interestingly, as we developed the program, we were made aware that no data existed based on previous efforts to speak directly to incarcerated youth.

A few significant data findings are bulleted below. The complete data set is attached as a PDF.

- A rather large proportion of youth recognize that it is their own bad choices that are most responsible for landing them in detention.
- There is strong recognition by the youth of the importance of family and role models in their development.
- The message about the importance of education has gotten through to these youth, and perhaps can be a source of future leverage in programming.
- It may be useful to engage the youth and detention staff in some further dialogue about the nature of "respect" since this was a major issue raised by the youth with the facilities.

The logistics of delivering this program successfully required an uncommon degree of collaboration between all stakeholders. In addition to Days of Dialogue in partnership with the Chaka Khan Foundation, collaborators who supported the initiative included the Department of Probation, LACOE, the LA City Attorney's Office Dispute Resolution Program, Mr. Robert Sowell, funders², 62 volunteer facilitators, and scholars and juveniles justice experts associated with UCLA, UC Berkeley, the Children's Defense Fund, and the Hayward Burns Institute. This list of collaborators is by no means complete. We thank you all for your commitment to helping to create a better future for incarcerated youth, and we look forward to developing the program further and continuing the work.

All youth who participated in "No Excuses: A Day of Dialogue on Creating a Better Future" received a discussion guide (see attached PDF) which includes a short list of employers who are offering jobs and training opportunities. The Chaka Khan Foundation is continuously developing this resource list and is the point of contact for the youth.

² Wells Fargo Gold Sponsor, The California Endowment, Carol Biondi, The Grammy Museum